

2 February 1973

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MEMORANDUM FOR: [REDACTED]
FROM: [REDACTED]
SUBJECT: "The History of FBIS"

I've just finished reading the three volume History of FBIS and the following comments are offered while the impressions are still fresh.

First, the positive impressions:

Skillful organization. This is the sine qua non of any good history, of course, and I think this work scores high on this account. It encompasses the history of the many organizations and sub-organizations that at one time or another have played a role in the development of FBIS over the past 25 years, and it does so while maintaining a clear and consistent focus on the central organization on whose evolution the fate of foreign broadcast monitoring in the United States has depended. Thus the organization is both broad enough to permit the telling of the whole story and yet focussed enough to give the narrative a point of view and a sense of momentum.

Clear presentation. The writing style is what I would call "tough"--good clear English, short direct sentences. I think the best comment I can make on it is to say that despite the extremely detailed nature of some of the material, I never found it tedious, nor did I ever lose the thread of the thought. There is another related virtue that should be mentioned here--the strong factual basis of the narrative. Having decided to base the narrative on official records, the author did not allow himself to become bogged down in a critical analysis of the sources. What he has given us is "what the record shows." While he may have missed some nuances by failing to supplement the record with oral testimony, he has at least spared us the distractions and uncertainties which an explicit analysis of uncertain or contradictory evidence would have entailed.

As for the negative side, I have one general and one specific comment. The general comment is that the author may have told us more than we ever wanted to know about FBIS. I think his accounts of administrative changes, particularly in the bureaus, are overly detailed. The specific comment is that names are frequently cited without official or functional designations being attached to them. Thus the reader who is not already familiar with FBIS may be at a loss from time to time to know where some person cited in the narrative fitted into the organizational scheme.